

# The RED LAMP



By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

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July 19.

A sudden and terrifying storm outside. Above the howling of the wind I can hear the surf beating against the shore. Halliday reports, over the telephone, that the float is in danger and that the runway has broken loose. But there is nothing to do. I have just been out, and I do not propose to be soaked again.

(Note: The approach of the storm had made Jane very nervous, and I had driven in to Doctor Hayward's for a sleeping medicine for her.)

Jock is as bad as Jane, and should have a narcotic also! He is moving uneasily from place to place, now and then emitting a dismal howl, and Clara is sitting forlornly at the foot of the staircase, under the impression that it is the only place free from metal in the house, and thus less likely to attract the lightning.

It is indeed a night for dark deeds. And for dark thoughts.

I wonder if I have any justification for my suspicions? Why should Hayward, preparing to go out to an obstetric case, start me along a new and probably unjustified line of thought? Surely, of all men in the world, he has the best right to carry ether. I must be careful not to do as Greenough has done, allow my necessity for finding the guilty man to run away with my judgment.

And yet, in spite of myself, I cannot help feeling that Hayward fulfills many of the requirements. He alone, of all the people hereabout, is free to move about the country at night without suspicion. He knew Uncle Horace "as well as anybody." He is—and God forgive me if I am wrong—enough of a sailor to know and use the half-bitch.

There are other points, also. He is about my age, if anything older, but he is a muscular man. And he is, like all general practitioners in the country, by way of being a surgeon also. He would know how to find the jugular vein of a sheep.

"In all earnestness I appeal to you to consider the enormity of the deed," wrote poor old Horace, more than a year ago. But while killing sheep is unpleasant, even sad, there is no particular enormity in it. I pass by a leg of spring-time lamb without considering that a tragedy lies behind it. The murder of Carroway, too, cannot come under the strictures of that letter; it was done as a matter of protection.

Nearst of all to the possibilities suggested by the letter comes the attack on Halliday, and if the sheep killer did that, why not have put his devilish symbol on the car during that silent ride of a mile before he prepared to strike?

Why have I crept in later and done it? But here again—the doctor had access to the car, after Greenough had examined it. He went in alone, according to Clara, and was there some time.

Was it, then, the doctor's typewriter which wrote the cipher over which Halliday has been puzzling? T. GelTr, K. 28?

July 20.

Maggie Morrison disappeared last night; disappeared as completely as though she had been wiped from the face of the earth by the storm.

Livingstone telephoned me the facts at seven this morning, and Halliday and I took the car and went over. We have been out with the searching party all day, but without result.

Tonight the search is still going on. Starr has sworn in more deputies, and the entire countryside is aroused. Jane has been ill all day, and has kept her bed.

July 21.

No trace of the unfortunate girl to-night, and all hope of finding her alive is slowly being abandoned.

I can now record such facts as we know, relative to the mystery.

The girl went in to Oakville yesterday to do some shopping, and remained for dinner with Thomas and

### One Last Hope

"I've got one advantage over you still," said the horse as he looked at the automobile that was sharing the barn. "When I'm worn out I can be worked up into canned beef and gumdrops, and you can't."

The South is having a difficult year. Arkansas, Texas, Georgia and California suffered cyclones; Alabama was hit by floods and now Florida turns up with a citrus pest which threatens the fruit crop of that state.

Human races are fleeting and changeful, but the human race remains.

A single grateful thought toward Heaven is the most perfect prayer.

The weakest spot in every man where he thinks himself the wisest.

his wife. In spite of Thomas' prophecy of a storm she insisted on staying over for a moving picture, and it was therefore ten-thirty when, alone in the farm truck, she started out of town.

Nothing more is known of her movements, save that she got as far as the Hillburn road, about two hundred yards beyond the Livingstones' gate. The truck was found there yesterday morning at daylight by an early laborer on the Morrison farm, who, however, thought that she had abandoned it there during the storm the night before, and neglected to report it.

At the farm house itself there was no uneasiness, as the family supposed the girl remained in town. But when the hour came for her to start with her milk delivery, and she had not arrived, inquiries were set on foot.

The truck shows no signs of any struggle, and that robbery was not the motive of whatever has happened is shown by the fact that the missing girl's pocketbook was found behind the seat of the truck, where she usually placed it.

Greenough and the sheriff were on the ground when we got there, as well as a small knot of country folk, kept at a distance by a deputy or two, and already a small posse, hastily recruited, was beating the wood nearby. Such clues as there may have been, however, had been obliterated by the storm. There is no trace of the dreaded symbol in chalk.

Halliday has reconstructed the story, in view of his own experience.

"The fellow was waiting," he said, "and hailed her, as he hailed me. He knew nobody would pass a man caught out in a storm like that. He got in, and closed the storm curtains, and of course she hadn't a chance in the world."

Possibly five hundred men and boys have been searching steadily since yesterday morning; the back country, where it happened, is fairly open; the sea, with its salt marshes, both of which would give unlimited opportunity for concealment, is fully six miles by road from where the truck was found.

Much talk is going around as to a story from the lighthouse on the extreme tip of Robinson's point today. As is to be expected, the superstitious are making considerable capital of it. And I myself am not disposed to dismiss it without considerable thought.

The story is as follows: On the night of the tragedy, a flying night bird of some sort broke one of those windows of the lighthouse which protect the light itself. The keeper and the second keeper repaired it as best they could, but the terrific gusts of the wind made them uneasy, and they remained on watch.

They sat, high in the air, in the room just beneath the light, now and then glancing up to see that all was well. The storm increased in violence, and as the sea came up the surf beat on the rocks below with a crashing only equaled by the thunder itself. As is usual in the high tide of the full moon, the low portion of the point to landward, and the keeper's houses, the engine shed, boathouse and oil storage tank were soon cut off from the mainland by a strip of angry ocean.

Nevertheless, they were comfortable enough, and the under-keeper had actually fallen asleep, at eleven o'clock, when there came a sudden lull in the storm. It was that time, which I well remember, when there came one of those ominous and quivering pauses in the attack which seem, not a promise of peace, but a gathering together of all the powers of wind, sea and sky for one final and tremendous effort.

And in that pause Ward, the light-keeper, heard something below in the tower. He touched his assistant on the shoulder and he sat up. Both of them then distinctly heard footsteps on the lowest flight of stairs, five floors below.

They were alone in the tower; cut off from the mainland by a rushing strip of tide, and no boat could have



Neither One of Them Moved or Spoke.

landed through the surf. And outside was that unearthly quiet which was more sinister than the storm itself. Neither one of them moved or spoke, but the keeper remembers that, as the steps came on inexorably, a cold air began to eddy around the small circular room, and that he looked up at the red-light apprehensively.

At the top of the second flight the steps paused, and both keepers drew a breath. Then they heard a small dry cough, and the steps recommenced on the third level.

Up and up. The stairs curved round the inside wall of the tower.

and they knew they would not see what was climbing until it was fairly on them. They sat there, their eyes glued to the door, and heard the steps coming up the last round. Whatever it was, it was on them. It reached the top, and the next step would bring it into view.

Then the storm burst again, in an explosion that fairly set the tower rocking, and simultaneously the electric lights in the room went out.

It was then that the assistant keeper swears that something touched him; something cold; but there seems to be no doubt, whether that is true or not, that the whole room was filled with the cold eddying wind referred to before.

I prefer to trust the head-keeper's statement. Ward is an unemotional type, and this is what he says:

"I was scared enough, but when the lights went out I looked up at the lamp. It's an oil burner, and it was all right. Old Faithful, we call it. Well, you have to understand that we weren't entirely in the dark, even then; some of the red light from above came down, and I could see where Jim was standing. I couldn't see him, I understand, but I could see where he was. And there was a third party in the room, over near the stair-door. That is, he was there one minute; the next he was gone."

Keeping close together the two men went down through the successive floors of the tower. They found nothing, and the outer door was still closed and bolted.

In view of so detailed and corroborative a statement, the final support of my early skepticism has had a severe blow.

What would be the change, should we enter another world, with the same faculties we have now, but no limitations in their use? To sorrow, to love, even perhaps to hate. And who shall laugh at the poor ghost who, knowing and suffering all things, makes its desperate attempt to avert a wickedness? To convey, through the thick mantle of the flesh, a knowledge that is not conveyance. To stand by, wringing its pale amorphous hands, while crimes go on and unnecessary wretchedness inhabits the earth?

Nothing bodily accounts for personality. Back of everything physical, and greater than anything physical, is the mind. And mind is not an attribute of matter.

July 22.

The body has not been found, and the sheriff has raised the reward to five thousand dollars. This with Livingstone's original five hundred for the sheep-killer, which is to go to the finder of the murderer as being in all probability the same individual, raises the reward to fifty-five hundred dollars.

Today, however, certain information acquired by Halliday has shifted the scene of the search to the salt marshes and the bay, and tonight, as I glance from my window I can see lanterns moving in the marsh beyond the main house, and up and down the shore. Jane has made coffee, and those of the searchers who come up this way from the beach have been stopping in.

Halliday's discovery, made today, is as follows: He calculated just how far the truck would have to go after it was hailed, before it stopped, and went back to that point, which was not far from the entrance to the Livingstone drive. Already the crowd of searchers and sensation hunters had pretty well destroyed any clew that might have been left, but about twenty yards from the gates he found marks in the mud indicating that, not only had the truck been backed to that point, but it had been turned there and headed back toward Oakville and the bay.

Just where it left the road again. If at all, is a question. I believe Halliday has taken a scraping from the wheels and proposes to have it analyzed. He finds something suspicious in it. I cannot say what.

I have spent today reorganizing my household. None of the women, including Clara, are to leave it after nightfall unaccompanied, and although no entrance into any house has yet been attempted, Halliday and I have spent the late afternoon tightening window locks and adding new bolts where they are necessary.

Jane has entirely recovered, and has today resumed work on her tapestry, with us a barometer of normality. She has even agreed to dine at the Livingstones tonight, not particularly to my delight.

"Come over and dine," Mrs. Livingstone telephoned, "and let's have a little bridge. I've had the horrors for three days."

"You don't object to my wearing my revolver, as a part of my evening outfit?"

"Everybody's doing it," she said. "This house has been turned into an arsenal."

Later: Doctor Hayward stopped in this evening for a final professional visit to Jane, and on an impulse I showed him Uncle Horace's letter. I may be mistaken, but it seemed to me that, under pretense of reading it a second time, he was playing for time.

"Curious!" he said, when he passed it back to me. "What do you make of it?"

"The last part of it is fairly clear. He was in danger, and knew it."

"But the rest of it?" he said. "What does he say? The wickedness of the idea. What idea?"

"You haven't any opinion on that yourself?"

"No," he said slowly. "I can't say that I have."

The tension of whatever it was seemed to relax then. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I thought it was addressed to me when I commenced. We'd had a long argument not long

before his death, on euthanasia. I believed in putting the unfit out of the world; he didn't. But of course the end of it settles that."

He laughed again, bit the end of a thumb, hesitated, and then got his hat. "Danger!" he said. "And the police! No, that wasn't for me."

"And you still believe he died of heart disease?"

"It was his heart, all right," he said, and going out, climbed heavily into his car. He seemed abstracted, and made no reply to my good-night.

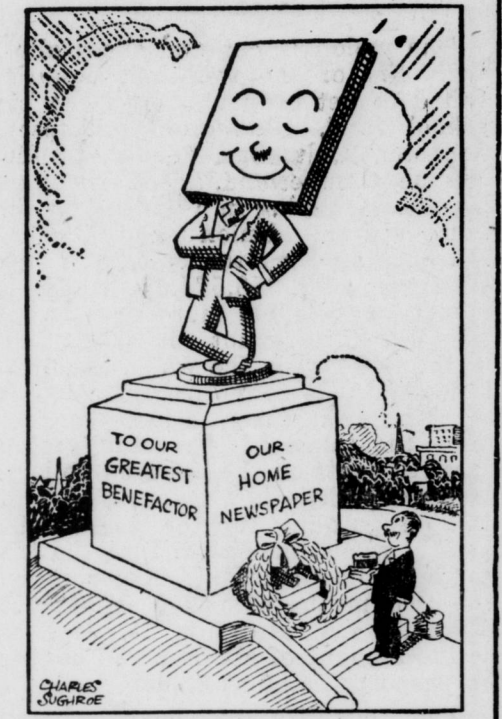
I can read into this what I like. His manner was not that of a guilty man; on the other hand, it was not entirely natural, either. He was both watchful and self-conscious. And I do not believe he read the letter twice.

One of the evening newspapers tonight prints a photostatic copy of the cipher found in our garage, and offers a prize for its solution.

Edith's memory is shown to have been faulty in only one particular. The cipher, as published reads: GelTr, K. 24.

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

## TOWN PROGRESS TALKS



Foremost among the institutions which develop a town is the home newspaper. It stands for progress; it is fair to all; it nurses no grudges; it protects its people from unwelcome publicity and causes needless sorrow to no one; it boosts every enterprise and supports all public improvements, sometimes at a financial loss; it promotes good fellowship at home and good feeling toward the town abroad. The editor regards his position as a solemn responsibility; he endeavors to be the leader in all movements that will keep his town abreast of competing towns; he does not fill his columns with the scum of the news to fill his till with dollars, though it bebauch the community. So why not a statue to the town's best friend, the home newspaper.

## JUST ONIONS

(The Mecklenburg Times)

Recently when a number of farmers were invited to the meeting of the Charlotte Rotary Club to hear Mr. Schaub, of the State College talk on farm conditions, Tom Broom, farm demonstration agent from Union county was present.

In our conversation with him following the meeting he said that once he told a group of farmers in his county that if they wanted to be millionaires to grow onions. This was because he had sensed a growing appetite for onions and because the crop was was easily grown and very productive.

There is a man in this county who is growing onions and from the reports coming to use he is making a decided success of the crop.

According to reports coming to this office B. W. Richardson came to this county from South Carolina some time ago and located in the Thomasboro section of the county. Last fall he planted one acre of onions and during the month of December sold 400 dozen bunches of the onions at \$1.75 per dozen. A few weeks ago the produce man for the Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company went out and looked over the remainder of the crop which was estimated at 700 dozen. There were to be delivered 60 dozen a day and the price was 75 cents a dozen.

Now if you will take your pencil and figure a little you will find that the total income from the crop off one acre was about \$1200. Forty bushels of onion sets were planted on the acre. We have no figures as to the amount of fertilizer and labor, but we are sure that Mr. Richardson had a good profit from this crop more than many farmers get from a dozen acres of cotton.

## First Berries Bring Handsome Returns

The dewberry season is on and for the next two weeks the Carolina fruit hills will be the scene of great activity in picking, packing and shipping the berries. First shipments, which went forward the middle of last week, netted handsome prices to the growers of around \$8.00 a crate. Such prices do not hold up long, of course, and if the season's average is half of that it will be good. Vines are small and there is little hope of a big yield, although if rain and sunshine comes in exactly the right proportion and at exactly the right time production may approach that of last year. Quality of the first berries was excellent. Hundreds of negroes were busy Monday picking berries, that being the first big picking of the year.

We cannot hear what some men say, for what they are sounds too loudly.

Good thoughts are no better than good dreams unless they are executed.

## My Favorite Stories

by Irvin S. Cobb

### The Final Bang

IN ORDER that the point of this story may be made clear, a word or two of preliminary explanation is required. Arthur Hopkins, one of the most successful of the younger group of theatrical producers, is a squarely built little man, not more than five feet six inches in height and with rather an emphatic way of speaking. It is characteristic of him that once he has made up his mind to a thing, he acts upon his decision with dispatch; nor, when he expresses himself, is there ever any doubt as to his exact meaning.

A season or so back, he put on rather an expensive play for a tryout before bringing it into New York. The production did not seem to go very well on the road. Nevertheless, the members of the cast, with the proverbial optimism of actor-folk, were hopeful that business might pick up and that, once they reached the big town, the piece might have a successful run.

But back in the home office Hopkins took a different view of the prospects. He ran through the figures of the box office reports, as sent in by the road manager, and immediately wired the latter to cancel all further bookings, pay the members of the company the required two weeks' salary, and ship the scenery and the properties back to the storehouse. Considerably disappointed at this outcome, the troupers returned to the city to look for new engagements. Naturally, Hopkins' action in so abruptly withdrawing the production became the subject of common gossip in the theatrical district.

A few days later, Wilton Lackaye was in the Lambs' club. An aspiring dramatist approached him.

"Say, Lackaye," he began, "maybe you can help me out. My latest comedy has just gone into rehearsals. It looks pretty good, too—everybody seems to like it; but we're shy a good gag line for the last act. You know how it helps, sometimes, if you bring the final curtain down with a wallop. I've racked my brain but I can't think of anything. I'm hoping maybe you can help me. If you've got time, I'll tell you briefly what the concluding scene is like and perhaps that'll give you an inspiration."

"I don't think you need to do all that," said Lackaye, softly. "If I get you, what you want is something short and snappy to close a new show with?"

"That's it." "All right," said Lackaye, "here it is in two words: 'Arthur Hopkins!'" (© by the McNaught Syndicate Inc.)

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